

The Long Small War: Indigenous Forces for Counterinsurgency

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“The [11] September attacks can be understood as the first battle in this new [epochal] war. If, as some historians argue, the twentieth century began in August 1914, it may be that the twenty-first century will be said to have begun in September 2001. . . . The alliance of which the United States is a part faces a long and bitter struggle.”¹

The United States and its partners are prosecuting a protracted war against insurgents and terrorists who are animated by an ideology stemming from a radical fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. As of early 2006, the American national security bureaucracy began to use the appellation the “long war” in place of the Global War on Terrorism. At least one document describes this long war as the defining struggle of our generation, one that shifts emphasis from large-scale conventional military operations to small-scale counterinsurgency operations. The long war may last for decades.

In distilled form, the corpus of current national strategic and military documents calls for American forces to leverage allies to help defeat insurgent and terrorist enemies in this perennial effort. For instance, the National Security Council’s November 2005 *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* calls for the development of Iraqi security forces while simultaneously carrying out a counterinsurgency campaign to defeat insurgents in Iraq. It identifies Iraq as a principal arena in the war against terror, stating that success there is an essential element in the long war. As another example, the February 2006 *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism*, the American military-strategic framework for prosecuting the long war, tasks the American military both to

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enable partner nations to counter terrorism and to help counter international ideological support for terrorism. Most recently, the March 2006 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* states that the United States must “strengthen alliances to defeat global terrorism” and stresses the need to work with allies and to build indigenous security forces to defeat terrorists and insurgents in Iraq and elsewhere.

The US Army’s interim field manual on counterinsurgency also underscored the requirement for leveraging indigenous security forces. The 2004 Field Manual Interim 3-07.22, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, highlighted the imperative to expand and employ capable native forces, which must be visibly involved in prosecuting the counterinsurgency to the fullest measure possible. This manual also explained how the use of indigenous forces can affect all three levels of war. Tactically, indigenous forces “eliminate insurgent leadership, cadre, and combatants, through death and capture by co-opting individual members, or by forcing insurgents to leave the area.” Operationally such forces help restore government control and legitimacy. And strategically they “serve as the shield for carrying out reform.” Most saliently, this doctrine prescribed that indigenous security forces operate in concert with American forces wherever practical and that they assume the major burden in military, paramilitary, and police functions, when capable of doing so. In sum, the exigencies of the political and strategic context in the foreseeable future, as codified in the corpus of cascading US national and military security doctrines, point to the imperative to create a credible capacity among our partners and indigenous allies to effectively counter insurgents and terrorists wherever they operate.²

The use of indigenous forces to prosecute counterinsurgency can provide a significant increase in the quantity of troops on the ground and yield an exponential improvement in actionable intelligence about the insurgency and its infrastructure. The US military has had some successful experiences in counterinsurgency. For the scope and purpose of this article, certain aspects of the Philippine and Vietnam wars provide some useful examples of how to employ indigenous forces—both regular and irregular—to effectively counter insurgents. The French Army likewise experienced some successful and partially successful episodes where it effectively leveraged indigenous

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forces to help in the prosecution of counterinsurgency warfare. Although the French Army failed to achieve victory in its wars in Indochina and Algeria, it did capture lessons from both concerning the effective use of indigenous forces. This article culls some of the germane counterinsurgency lessons from the American and French experiences with the employment of indigenous forces in the Philippines, Vietnam, and Algeria. It concludes with some ideas for integrating regular and irregular indigenous forces with both conventional and unconventional American forces and agencies.³

The American Army in the Philippine War

The Philippine War lasted from 1899 to 1902, and during this counterinsurgency the US military learned how to employ indigenous scouts and paramilitary forces to increase and sustain decentralized patrolling. Since the American forces were seriously undermanned, at first they relied on local Filipino help for logistics, then as police and scouts, and ultimately as armed units. The US military was able to enlist auxiliaries during the Philippine insurgency in a number of ways. The Philippine Scouts originated from irregular fighters raised from the Macabebes for employment against the guerrillas in the swamps of central Luzon. In particular, the Army recruited the Macabebes because the tribe had harbored a long-standing animosity for the Tagalogs, who constituted the majority of the insurgents. On Samar, the Americans organized a scout force with volunteers from hemp merchant families who opposed the guerrillas because they were losing influence as a result of insurgent actions. In western Mindanao, local Muslim leaders performed so well in suppressing the Catholic guerrillas that the Americans confronted very little resistance there. A combination of religious zeal and self-preservation impelled the sectarian members of the *Guardia de Honor* to join the US cause against the anti-clerical insurgents in La Union province. Lastly, in some instances the town police forces also proved themselves effective in countering guerrillas.⁴

One account of America's role in small wars attributes American success in the Philippines to its aggressive use of saturation patrolling to locate and subdue the insurgents. Armed principally with rifles, the Americans were able to successfully prosecute this war of small, dispersed, and very mobile formations only with the assistance of indigenous scouts. Combined American forces comprising US soldiers and Filipino scouts hunted insurgents who were "increasingly isolated both by the indifference or hostility of much of the population and by the concentration of scattered peasant groups into larger settlements." One bold example of employing the Macabebe Scouts effectively to capture guerrilla leaders was Brigadier General Fred Funston's raid to capture the rebel leader Aguinaldo. Funston learned from intercepted dispatches of an Aguinaldo request for 400 guerrilla reinforcements at his jungle headquarters.

Funston quickly devised a deceptive raid on the headquarters: the Macabebe Scouts posed as insurgent reinforcements with five American officers as prisoners, with Funston among them. Totalling 89 men, the raiding force consisted of a Spanish intelligence officer on the American payroll, four renegade rebels, five US officers, and 79 Macabebe Scouts posing in captured insurgent uniforms. After the force infiltrated through 100 miles of dense jungle, the ruse was so convincing that Aguinaldo's honor guard welcomed the party, just before the Macabebe Scouts surrounded Aguinaldo and the Spanish intelligence officer announced that they were Americans.⁵

The US Army conducted its counterinsurgency in the Philippines using some techniques that were similar to techniques it had employed successfully in the American West against its irregular opponents during the Indian Wars. Indeed, 26 of the 30 US generals who served in the Philippines during the insurgency between 1898 and 1902 had also served in the Indian Wars. The need for mobility and knowledge about the terrain and enemy led the Army to establish special detachments of mounted scouts and infantry. These detachments were handpicked elite units that performed the preponderance of reconnaissance and strike operations in the counterinsurgency war. Veterans of the Indian Wars appreciated the value of indigenous soldiers, who possessed a threefold advantage in their knowledge of the people, the terrain, and the language. They comprehended, as Crook and others had in the Indian Wars before them, that the employment of indigenous forces as auxiliaries or scouts would also contribute to a "divide-and-subjugate" operational campaign. Filipino insurgents also suffered from the devastating psychological blow of learning that their own people were helping to hunt them down. Recruiting Macabebes and similarly distinct indigenous groups accrued the additional advantage of undermining the unity of the population by exploiting the extant seams in Filipino society. The more knowledgeable officers also realized early on that it would be imperative to eliminate the guerrillas' infrastructure, and toward the end of the war the Army increasingly employed Philippine Scouts, spies, and informants to gather intelligence on and to attack the insurgent infrastructure.⁶

At the end of the war, the United States commanded over 15,000 indigenous auxiliary forces, organized into the Philippine Scouts, the Philippine Constabulary, and local police forces. By most accounts, the American Army was successful in the Philippines because it recognized the imperatives to protect the population and to conduct an aggressive counterinsurgency campaign by leveraging indigenous forces for reconnaissance and intelligence operations.⁷

The French Experience in Indochina

French forces fought two consecutive wars in Indochina and Algeria that witnessed the employment of indigenous forces in the conduct of coun-

terinsurgency operations. In their war in Algeria, the French adopted some effective methods within the military sphere, but they failed to link their military methods to the political exigencies of that war. Indeed, there are some parallels to be discerned between the counterinsurgency in Algeria and the US counterinsurgency in Iraq. By the end of the war in Indochina, the French Expeditionary Force, in airborne units alone, comprised six European battalions, including two airborne legionnaire battalions, six Vietnamese battalions, one battalion each from Cambodia and Laos, and a miscellany of support units, all of which necessitated the creation of a separate Airborne Forces Command Indochina. Although exact figures for the entire indigenous troop strength serving with the French in Indochina remain elusive, approximately 325,000 of the total of 500,000 French forces in Indochina were Indochinese. Almost all of these soldiers were employed in conventional formations.⁸

However, the French did form mobile counterguerrilla groups comprising indigenous tribes. Later renamed the *Groupement Mixte d'Intervention* (GMI), they were initially called Composite Airborne Commando Groups, or GCMA. The purpose of these organizations was to conduct mobile counter-guerrilla operations in the rear areas of the Viet Minh. Some GCMA operations began to gain strategic importance by the end of 1953. One of the most successful of these operations was a combined assault against Lao-Kay in Vietnam and Coc-Leu in China, sister cities on the Sino-Vietnamese border that served as important enemy logistics hubs. With the support of a French paratroop platoon that dropped in directly over the target, 600 Meo and T'ai tribesmen raided Coc-Leu on 3 October 1953. The raiding force completely surprised the enemy and destroyed important supply depots, inflicting about 150 communist casualties before it safely withdrew into the mountains. In the end, however, the GCMA operations had difficulties. An expert on the French war in Indochina concluded that the Composite Airborne Commando Groups "were designed for a mission of guerrilla warfare which they performed well, but not for one of raiding against well-organized forces, which would have required a level of tactical training and coordination that could not reasonably be expected from primitive tribesmen."⁹

The biggest challenge to the adaptability of the Legion forces in Indochina was the so-called *jaunissement*, or "yellowing process," which was the French term for the effort to increase their force strength by the increased integration of Vietnamese forces with French forces. Thirty thousand Vietnamese regulars and 35,000 auxiliaries were serving along with French forces in early 1951. One year after that, the number of Vietnamese serving for the French had increased to 54,000 regulars and 58,000 auxiliaries, with another 15,000 Vietnamese in training. Training this many indigenous forces was the crux of the French challenge: 400 French commissioned and noncommis-

sioned officers were dedicated to these fledgling Vietnamese formations from French Army units that were already stretched to their limits in manpower. Additionally, the French command ordered the Legion to form composite battalions with a foundation of 534 legionnaire officers and noncommissioned officers, coupled with 292 indigenous recruits. Each Legion regiment incorporated a composite battalion, in some cases two, and every Legion battalion attached a mixed company under its command and control. This experiment increased the number of troops available to fight the war, and some Vietnamese formations acquitted themselves with honorable military performances.¹⁰

Problems with the mixed Vietnamese and Legion units were manifold. First, the effort to increase the number of indigenous Vietnamese forces lacked political direction and motivation. Indeed, the French command was convinced that the Viet Minh already had skimmed off the cream of the recruitment pool, collecting the most politically motivated and physically fit, leaving the flotsam for the French recruiting efforts. The recruitment effort and the Vietnamese formations that emerged from them simply lacked legitimacy because the French refused to make the political concessions to the Bao Dai government that would have conferred to it status and autonomy in the eyes of the Vietnamese people. Additionally, because the French Army trained these indigenous troops and because the American Army at least partially equipped them, the Vietnamese formations were not nearly as adapted to the conditions of guerrilla warfare in Indochina as were their Viet Minh adversaries. More important, the French tended to misuse these indigenous forces, particularly the auxiliaries, by positioning them and their families in isolated outposts with the hope that they would fight relentlessly to defend them. This “war of the posts” was extremely tedious because the side that did not have the support of the population was required to be constantly vigilant and continuously ready for action. The proliferation of posts, moreover, made these forces increasingly vulnerable to attack because of the smaller size of their contingents and because their Viet Minh opponents adapted their tactics and their weaponry faster than the French-controlled forces could adapt their defensive measures.¹¹

The French defeat in Indochina brought groups within the army to the recognition that conventional methods of colonial suppression were inadequate to confront a politically sophisticated enemy fighting on his native territory. To many army professionals, the loss of Indochina to the communists proved clearly that *esprit de corps* and conventional patriotism were insufficient weapons against revolutionary élan—especially so if their claim was true that the government neither sufficiently supported nor understood the nature of the fighting. The *guerre révolutionnaire* theorists came to understand that the insurgents in Algeria fought for a cause, and, whatever label they ascribed to

the rebel ideology, what was salient to them was the imperative to create an equally effective counter-ideology. These theorists insisted that the French Army would fight the next war under different conditions. They called for two changes: that the nation and the government must give the fullest support to the armed forces, and that the French forces had to undergo revolutionary changes in their tactics as well as in their concept of a duty ethic.¹²

The French Experience in Algeria

A key tenet of the French Army revolutionary warfare theory was the idea that the Army must guide its methods in Algeria as much by psychological and political considerations as by purely military ones. These officer-theorists intended to inspire their tactics with guerrilla warfare and to exploit every success with psychological operations directed at demoralizing the enemy. Thus, the doctrine of *guerre révolutionnaire*, as subsequently manifested in Algeria, framed a conflict waged within a state, a type of conflict that one French military analyst distilled down to the following formula: partisan warfare, plus psychological warfare, equals revolutionary warfare.¹³

In Algeria, the French High Command recognized the imperative of employing the largest number of Muslims possible, but they also understood the shortcomings that inhered in such an effort: in a poor and overpopulated country many of the indigenous troops simply served for money and a meal; Algerian forces complicated the operational context; and the loyalty and the reliability of these forces were often suspect, sometimes enabling infiltration by the enemy, the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN). The total contribution of the Muslim troops to the French counterinsurgency effort for the duration of the war was significant, approaching 150,000 regulars and auxiliaries. In addition to the village defense forces, the French employed three principal types of indigenous forces. The *harkas*, squad-sized supplementary forces commanded by French officers and senior noncommissioned officers, were the most significant of these, and they conducted both assigned sector and mobile operations, either as commandos or as part of a regular company or platoon. The *makhzan* were recruited guards, orderlies, and messengers who supplemented the French Army's civil affairs teams. Lastly, the civil administration also employed thousands of Muslims as auxiliary policemen and in the mobile security groups, including the *Paras Bleus*, who comprised former FLN guerrillas and terrorists.¹⁴

One example of a French innovation in Algeria that met with some success, both in winning hearts and minds and in harnessing the support of indigenous elements, was the creation of a new corps called the *Sections Administratives Spécialisées*, or SAS. The French authorities in Algeria created some 400 SAS detachments, each under the command of an army captain

or lieutenant who was an expert in Arab affairs and Arabic, trained to handle every possible aspect of civil-military administration, from building houses and administering justice, to health, teaching, and agronomy. In some respects, the SAS units seem to have been the forebears to the Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS) teams that served well during the later years of the US war in Vietnam, and even as harbingers of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) that now operate in Afghanistan.¹⁵

The SAS members were affectionately called the *képis bleus*, and they were a selflessly dedicated group of very qualified men whom the local populaces came to love and whom the FLN army (the ALN) came to target often because of their effectiveness and because of the concomitant threat they posed to the insurgent cause. The SAS detachments consequently suffered the highest casualties of any category of administrator. By 1957 and 1958, the crucial service that the SAS detachments performed had begun to have some effect in restoring the population's confidence in the French presence in large swaths of Algeria. For example, the French Army had tripled the number of primary schools it had opened between April 1956 and August 1957, and the number of Muslim functionaries in French service had increased from about 6,850 to almost 10,000. It was a notable improvement, but it was not sufficient. With the myriad qualifications required for work in the SAS, there were too few SAS members to bring about the effect intended throughout Algeria.¹⁶

The thinking of the French Army planners also increasingly turned to concepts for employing special operations to help counter the insurgents. In addition to the "black commandos," lightly armed detachments of guerrilla-like troops assigned the role of roaming with the Muslim populations in the countryside, 1957 witnessed the serious development of *harkas* forces composed of what the French considered to be loyal Algerians. In one example, French ethnologist Jean Servier had been granted permission to create light companies from some 1,000 trustworthy and able-bodied defectors, former FLN fighters. Because every Muslim soldier who served away from his family was potentially vulnerable to a threatening letter from the FLN, Servier insisted that his *harkas* units be located near their homes. Servier's *harkas* quickly proved very resilient in hunting down the ALN, partly because these troops were familiar with every path in their local areas. News of the *harkas*' good conditions and good pay quickly spread and precipitated a concomitant increase in these quasi-private armies. For example, during the two years beginning in January 1957, the quantity of *harkas*' self-defense villages increased from 18 to 385, with their total manpower ultimately reaching 60,000. However, the quality of these *harkas* formations varied widely, and in direct proportion to the quality of the SAS administrators within whose purviews they operated.¹⁷

Another example of effective French special counterinsurgent operations in Algeria, one that employed turncoat indigenous forces in an irregular role, was the “blue operations.” Known as *Léger’s bleus*, they were named after their founder, Captain Christian Léger, a shadowy intelligence officer who had worked for Colonel Roger Trinquier during the Battle of Algiers as the head of a top-secret organization called the Intelligence and Exploitation Group, or GRE. The GRE had established a network of Muslim agent informers who, unbeknownst to the FLN, had been turned at the French paratroopers’ interrogation centers in Algiers. Discerning the value of these *bleu* double agents after the Battle of Algiers, Captain Léger expanded and exploited this network of *bleus* to fully infiltrate the FLN infrastructure that re-established itself in Algiers after the battle. Essentially in control of the FLN apparatus without the insurgent leadership’s knowledge, the GRE’s *bleus* were able to deceive and capture the equivalent of the FLN general staff in the Algiers operational zone in January 1958. This neutralization was so thorough that the FLN was unable to recreate its infrastructure in Algiers until the closing months of the war.¹⁸

The fact that over 25 percent of the ground forces were Algerian, serving under the French tricolor, added some credibility to the French claim that it was not fighting against Algeria but for Algeria. Many indigenous troops distinguished themselves in combat, but the French were more inclined to use them for reconnaissance, guard, transport, and supply functions. Their recruitment often included a guarantee for the security of the *harkas*’ families, and thus the French Army in some instances had to pay to build protected compounds for the dependents of these forces.

Indeed, if the French had implemented a more effective political program, with an integrated military component and flexible counterinsurgency tactics that did not alienate the population and the French public, they might have achieved a more favorable outcome. Even the French officers who readily embraced the theory of *guerre révolutionnaire* had to concede that it would have been impossible to prosecute the war to the fullest measure within the context of a liberal and multi-party metropolitan France. The nature of their operational techniques and their need to impose on the French polity a policy of full support for the war was incompatible with the proper notion of subordinating the military instrument to civilian policy. Victory would have required employing the totality of the elements of national power, not just military power alone.¹⁹

Vietnam: CORDS, CAP, and Irregulars

Although some Americans may think of Vietnam in the context of big-unit battles of attrition, the other war—counterinsurgency and pacification—

where Special Forces, Marines, and other advisers employed indigenous forces using small-war methods, is much more relevant to 21st-century counterinsurgencies. In the summer of 1968, when General Creighton Abrams became the commander of the war in Vietnam, he put an end to the two-war approach by adopting a one-war focus on pacification. Abrams' unified strategy to clear and hold the countryside by pacifying and securing the population met with notable success. Abrams based his approach on a study that the Army staff had prepared in 1966—*A Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam (PROVN)*. Abrams' *PROVN*-based expansion of the Civil Operations and Rural Development and Support (CORDS) program, the Marines' Combined Action Program (CAP), and the use of the 5th Special Forces Group in organizing Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) all provide examples of successful aspects of counterinsurgency that could be useful for the long war.²⁰

CORDS was integrated under Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) in 1967 when Abrams was still the Deputy Commander and Robert Komer was the CORDS Director, but it was Abrams and William Colby, Komer's successor, who focused more on making CORDS work. Under the one-war strategy, CORDS was established as the organization under MACV to unify and provide oversight of the pacification effort. From mid-1968 onward, Abrams and Colby made CORDS and pacification the main effort. An invigorated civil and rural development program provided increased support, advisers, and funding to the police and territorial forces. Essentially, this rural development program allowed military and civilian US Agency for International Development (USAID) advisers to work with their Vietnamese counterparts at the province and village levels to improve local security and develop infrastructure.

Identifying and eliminating the Viet Cong infrastructure were critical parts of the new focus on pacification, and Colby's approach—the Accelerated Pacification Campaign—included the Phuong Hoang program, or Phoenix. With some exceptions, the Phoenix program's use of former Viet Cong guerrillas and indigenous Provincial Reconnaissance Units to root out the enemy's shadow government was effective. The Accelerated Pacification Campaign focused on territorial security, neutralizing the Viet Cong infrastructure, self-defense, and self-government at the local level.²¹

The Accelerated Pacification Campaign called for the employment of former Viet Cong who had been turned to fight for the government under the Chieu Hoi program. Because of their specialized knowledge of the enemy, the Chieu Hoi cadre was particularly useful in the elimination of the Viet Cong infrastructure. This cadre provided indigenous manning for the Provincial Reconnaissance Units. Interestingly enough, 1969, the year after the Tet

Offensive, witnessed an all-time high in Chieu Hoi recruitment, with 47,087 enemy cadre and troops electing to change sides and serve the government of South Vietnam, evidently as a result of setbacks during and after Tet. By late 1970, the Accelerated Pacification Campaign had helped the South Vietnamese government control most of the countryside. “Four million members of the People’s Self-Defense Force, armed with some 600,000 weapons” exemplified the commitment of the population in support of the South Vietnamese government in opposition to the enemy. The Hamlet Evaluation System was an imperfect tool, but as a measure of pacification it indicated that from 1969 to 1970, some 2,600 hamlets had become secure. Practical measures of the Accelerated Pacification Campaign’s success were a reduction in the extortion of taxes by the Viet Cong, a reduction in recruiting by the enemy in South Vietnam, and a decrease in enemy food provisions taken from the villagers. Other reasons why South Vietnam was able to expand its control of the countryside by that time actually resulted from the enemy’s Tet Offensive in January 1968 and its Mini-Tet in May 1968—the Viet Cong’s brutality toward civilians during the Tet offensives helped create a willingness among the South Vietnamese to accept more aggressive conscription that was needed to expand the size of the forces in the South.²²

Another program that improved the US military’s capacity to secure the population and to acquire better tactical intelligence was the US Marine Corps’ Combined Action Program (CAP). CAP was a local innovation that coupled a Marine rifle squad with a platoon of local forces and positioned this combined action platoon in the village of those local forces. This combined Marine/Vietnamese platoon trained, patrolled, defended, and lived in the village together. The mission of the CAP was severalfold: to destroy the Viet Cong infrastructure within the village area of responsibility; to protect public security and help maintain order; to protect friendly infrastructure; to protect bases and communications within the villages; to organize indigenous intelligence nets; and to conduct civic action and propaganda programs against the Viet Cong.

Civic action played an important role in efforts to destroy the Viet Cong by gleaning intelligence about enemy activity from the local population. Because combined action platoons protected the people from reprisals, they were ideal for acquiring intelligence from the locals. The Marines’ emphasis on pacifying the highly populated areas prevented the guerrillas from coercing the local population into providing rice, intelligence, and sanctuary. The Marines would clear and hold a village in this way and then expand the secured area. The CAP units accounted for 7.6 percent of the enemy killed while representing only 1.5 percent of the Marines in Vietnam. The Combined Action Program provides a useful model for protracted counterinsur-

gencies because it employed US troops in an economy-of-force role while maximizing the employment of indigenous troops. In this way, a modest investment of US forces at the local level can yield major improvements in security and intelligence.²³

For much of the Vietnam War, the 5th Special Forces Group also trained and led CIDG Mobile Strike Forces (“Mike Forces”) and reconnaissance companies that were manned by ethnic minority tribes from the mountain and border regions. These strike forces conducted reconnaissance by employing small-unit patrols; they also defended their home bases in the border areas, denying them to the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese regular units. The rationale for the CIDG forces was twofold: to create a paramilitary force raised from the minority groups of Vietnam to strengthen and broaden the counterinsurgency effort; and to prevent the Viet Cong from recruiting them first with their propaganda because, as malcontented minorities, the Montagnards and other minority groups were prime targets for such efforts. There was also a geographic-strategic logic for the CIDG program: the government was failing to assert sovereignty and security over the tribal-minority-populated areas of the highlands and the remote lowland districts of the Mekong Delta, and as a result the government was not exploiting the area as a buffer for early warning of Viet Cong infiltration.

As early as December 1961, US Special Forces were training indigenous paramilitaries as mountain commandos. These mountain scouts conducted long-range reconnaissance in remote mountain and jungle areas to establish a presence and to collect intelligence. Another early CIDG program witnessed Special Forces cadre training indigenous trail watchers, whose mission was to locate and report Viet Cong movements near the border. The trail watcher program was significant in that it was the precursor to the border surveillance program, where area development and border surveillance combined to create one of the more valuable components of the CIDG program.²⁴

In 1963, the area development program grew and shifted toward the western borders of Vietnam. In 1964 these irregular forces also took on other roles, taking on missions that involved operations against Viet Cong safe havens and operations to interdict Viet Cong infiltration routes into Vietnam. Following the buildup of US conventional forces in 1965, the next stage in the evolution of the CIDG program began, casting the Special Forces and the irregulars in an offensive role, as hunters, with the mission of finding and eliminating the enemy. By 1967 Project Delta had expanded to 16 reconnaissance teams whose operations initially involved the infiltration and the reconnaissance of Viet Cong-controlled areas. These teams were subsequently authorized to attack targets small enough for them to handle without help. Another

irregular force was the Apache Force, which saw combined forces of indigenous troops and Special Forces orienting American battalions prior to their commitment against Viet Cong or North Vietnamese Army forces. During 1966-67 American field commanders also increasingly employed Special Forces-led indigenous Mike Forces in long-range reconnaissance missions or as security elements in support of regular units. Other CIDG-type forces, called mobile guerrilla forces, raided enemy base areas and employed hit-and-run guerrilla tactics against regular enemy units.

To be sure, the CIDG program provided a significant contribution to the war effort. The 2,500 soldiers assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group raised and led an army of 50,000 tribal fighters to operate in some of the most austere terrain in Vietnam. CIDG patrolling of border infiltration areas also provided reliable tactical intelligence, and the CIDG forces provided a degree of security for populations in areas that might have been otherwise conceded to the enemy.²⁵

Conclusion

Writing in 1962 about guerrilla warfare, Peter Paret and John Shy commented, “Only if the government has the opportunity and the boldness to recruit unusual personnel—former insurgents, for example—and permits them to fight in an unorthodox political framework, does there seem any prospect for success.”²⁶ This article has examined militaries that employed indigenous forces in regular and irregular roles to increase the number of capable indigenous forces, to eliminate insurgents and insurgent infrastructure, to help restore government legitimacy, and to assume a larger burden of military, paramilitary, and police functions. There are two generalizations that derive from these examples of employing indigenous forces in counter insurgencies: heterogeneity of formation offers greater value and utility, and operating with economy compels innovation and adaptation. In all four of the cases examined, intervention forces combined with indigenous elements and thereby achieved significant results: an exponential increase in the forces available to prosecute counterinsurgency; better knowledge of the terrain and environment; and more actionable intelligence about the enemy and enemy sanctuaries. In all four of these examples, American and French forces were not heavily armed and were relatively thinly manned vis-à-vis the insurgents.

For example, the employment of Chieu Hoi former Viet Cong as irregular scouts to hunt down the insurgent leadership worked somewhat effectively and offered the additional value of unhinging the enemy morally and psychologically. Two merits derived from this approach: it balanced the enemy’s special skills in irregular warfare, and it significantly increased friendly

knowledge of the terrain and of the enemy. For a decade in Vietnam, US Special Forces trained and led indigenous tribal groups on conventional and special operations in some of the most inhospitable border areas of western Vietnam, with some degree of success. They ultimately led Roadrunner teams, Mike Forces, and mobile counter guerrilla forces to locate and target the Viet Cong in its own sanctuaries. CORDS, CAP, and CIDG thus met with some success in prosecuting key aspects of the counterinsurgency in Vietnam.

The French experience in Algeria is insightful because it shows how an innovative concept like the SAS detachments, whose officers were experts in Arabic and Arab affairs, achieved some success in winning hearts and minds, and in leveraging the employment of indigenous elements. By 1957 and 1958, the services that the SAS detachments performed had begun to have some effect in restoring the population's confidence in the French. A salient example of the French use of indigenous irregulars in a special operations role was the "blue operations." *Léger's bleus*, a group of turned insurgents, were effectively employed in a double-agent network that was able to fully infiltrate and neutralize the FLN infrastructure in the Algiers operational zone by January 1958.

The French effort to integrate security and development through the SAS was conceptually sound, but there were difficulties in establishing an adequate number of qualified detachments to cover all the regions in Algeria. These same challenges obtain for the US military and its coalition partners in establishing the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) in Afghanistan and with similar emerging models in Iraq. The similarities between the French use of the GRE *bleu* operations to eliminate FLN infrastructure in Algeria and the US use of the Phoenix program's Provincial Reconnaissance Units to eliminate Viet Cong infrastructure point to the potential utility of this model on the borders of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Each of these programs expanded the quality and quantity of the forces conducting pacification and counterinsurgency, improved the capacity for dispersed small-unit patrolling, and consequently improved the scope and content of actionable intelligence. The lessons of these programs are salient today, both in Afghanistan and Iraq, because improving the quantity and capabilities of indigenous forces, ensuring that there is an integrated and unified civil-military approach, and increasing the security of the population all continue to be central goals toward successful outcomes. The advantages that indigenous forces bring to the lead country in a campaign to counter insurgents, whether as auxiliaries or integrated troops, clearly are of value. A significant lesson which the efforts described in this article show is that the deliberate and early employment of indigenous forces in a counterinsurgent role can be an effective method in helping to achieve success.

One notion for integrating indigenous forces in counterinsurgency today, across the gamut of special and conventional missions, might be a joint and combined interagency counterinsurgency task force headquarters that integrates elements from the armed services' conventional forces, Special Operations Forces (SOF), the CIA, Department of State, and indigenous intelligence elements. This task force might then include three subordinate components that build on the lessons in this article:

- A composite special reconnaissance and direct-action unit that would comprise turncoat indigenous former insurgents or friendly tribes, special mission units, and other government assets, with the assignments of gathering intelligence, locating enemy infrastructure, and eliminating insurgent leadership.
- A combined action force that would build on the Combined Action Program used in Vietnam, consisting of combined coalition and indigenous conventional elements, with the roles of area denial and saturation patrolling within the entire task force area of operations.
- A composite reserve or decisive-action force postured over the horizon, ready for helicopter or fixed-wing insertion, building on the Apache Force concept from Vietnam and comprising conventional coalition mobile groups that include SOF-led attachments of turned insurgents, with the role of responding to developing actions that are beyond the means of the combined action force.

A task force that organizes and integrates special, conventional, and indigenous forces in this way, leveraging the best counterinsurgency practices surveyed here, would be able to carry out the full range of counterinsurgency requirements within an autonomous area of operations.

NOTES

1. Philip Bobbitt, *The Sword of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), pp. 820-21.

2. US Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, FMI (Field Manual Interim) 3-07.22 (Washington: Department of the Army, October 2004), pp. 1-10 and 3-8. Under the auspices of the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, moreover, a team is currently writing a new and much-improved counterinsurgency manual that should be published in the summer of 2006. The new manual is said to have a separate chapter on training indigenous forces, and to stress their importance even more than the current FMI.

3. The use of the word indigenous here simply connotes forces comprising troops from the native populations of the region. In cases where the state or region is multi-ethnic or multi-tribal, this term applies to all those local people who offer the potential to serve as trained auxiliaries to the government forces, as government forces, or with the occupation forces. On French counterinsurgency theory, see Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (London: Pall Mall Press Ltd., 1964). Trinquier, a French counterinsurgency theorist, served in both Indochina and Algeria. *Modern Warfare* is on-line at <http://www-cgsc.army.mil/carl/resources/csi/trinquier/trinquier.asp>.

4. Brian McAllister Linn, "The U.S. Army and Nation Building and Pacification in the Philippines," in *Armed Diplomacy: Two Centuries of American Campaigning* (Fort Leavenworth, Kans.: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2003), pp. 84-87.

5. Max Boot, *Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), pp. 118-19, 126-28; and Anthony James Joes, *America and Guerrilla Warfare* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2000), pp. 120-23.

6. One should note that “undermining the unity of the population” is not always desirable, and may be a drawback in fighting insurgents.

7. Boot, pp. 127-28; and Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1860-1941* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1998), pp. 114-17.

8. Douglas Porch, *The French Foreign Legion* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), pp. 525, 546-47; Lawrence E. Cline, *Pseudo Operations and Counterinsurgency: Lessons from Other Countries* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2005), pp. 6-7.

9. Bernard B. Fall, *Street without Joy* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), pp. 97, 275-79. GCMA, in French, was *Groupements de Commandos Mixtes Aéroportés*. Another heterogeneous unit that performed extremely well in Indochina was the *Bataillon de Marche Indochinois* (BMI), a composite unit comprising Europeans, resilient Vietnamese mountaineers, and Cambodians; it was one of the best infantry battalions of the war.

10. Porch, pp. 550-51.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 543, 551-54.

12. Peter Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare from Indochina to Algeria* (New York: Praeger, 1964), pp. 26-27, 100-02. On pages 23-32, Paret offers a lucid and distilled explanation of the French doctrine of *guerre révolutionnaire*.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10, 23, and 28-30.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 40-41. *Quadrillage* was the French Army term for their system of checkerboard garrisons and fortified posts, designed to impose a network of close territorial control in the greater part of Algeria north of the Sahara. It derived from the French verb *quadriller*, which means to mark out in squares and to keep under tight control. The term *makhzan* was the Moroccan term for the Sultan’s administration. It stems from the French policy in Morocco during the Lyautey era that distinguished between those under government control—*makhzan*—and those who were not. The term came to mean collaborators or colonial (indigenous) soldiers in the Algerian context. The FLN, or the *Front de Libération Nationale*, was the Francophone term for the National Liberation Front, which was the political entity that directed the Algerian insurgents’ operations.

15. Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace* (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 108-09, 220.

16. *Ibid.* The ALN acronym connotes the National Liberation Army and is from the Francophone term *Armée de Libération Nationale*.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 251-61.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 255-61. In English, the GRE translates to the Intelligence and Exploitation Group from the French, *Groupe de Renseignement et d’Exploitation*.

19. Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare*, pp. 27-28, 40-41.

20. US Department of the Army, *A Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1966), pp. 1-9, hereinafter, *PROVN*. See Lewis Sorley, *A Better War* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999), pp. 10-125.

21. Sorley, pp. 22-23, 64-67.

22. Tran Dinh Tho, *Pacification* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1997), pp. 70, 135. The “Chieu Hoi,” or “Open Arms,” program was a psychological operation in Vietnam with two objectives: to induce Viet Cong defections and to increase the solidarity of South Vietnam’s citizens in support of the government. Also, see Sorley, pp. 22-23, 64-67, 72-73, and 217-24. The Accelerated Pacification Campaign began in November 1968. The Tet Offensive in January 1968 and the subsequent Mini-Tet in May 1968 resulted in devastating losses to Viet Cong forces in the South.

23. Frank Pelli, “Insurgency, Counterinsurgency, and the Marines in Vietnam,” unpublished paper, US Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Quantico, Va., 1990, pp. 13-16; and Brooks R. Brewington, “Combined Action Platoons: a Strategy for Peace Enforcement,” unpublished paper, US Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Quantico, Va., 1996, pp. 13-19. See James Donovan, “Combined Action Program: Marines’ Alternative to Search and Destroy,” *Vietnam Magazine*, August 2004, for an explanation of how the Marines’ experience in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua served as the conceptual basis for CAP.

24. Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1988), pp. 196, 203-06; and Francis J. Kelley, *U.S. Army Special Forces 1961-1971* (Washington: Department of the Army, 2004), pp. 19, 32-33.

25. Clarke, *Advice and Support*, pp. 203-06; and Kelley, *U.S. Army Special Forces 1961-1971*, pp. 14, 35, 46, 90, and 137. Project Delta became operational in December 1964 and was the first special operations unit that combined Special Forces and irregulars. Roadrunner teams conducted long-distance reconnaissance over enemy trail networks. These 16 Delta reconnaissance teams comprised two Special Forces members, four Vietnamese members, eight roadrunner teams, and a reaction force of six companies.

26. Peter Paret and John W. Shy, *Guerrillas in the 1960’s* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), pp. 73-74.